Nacubo Meeting Attendees Say Economic Downturn Is Not All Bad News
By GOLDIE BLUMENSTYK

The economy is never far from the minds of the more than 2,200 college business officers and vendors attending the annual meeting of the National Association of College and University Business officers here, but a few people attending sessions or wandering through the exhibit halls noted that the downturn also presents some good opportunities.

"It's a good time for doing construction," said Glenn Carter, associate vice president for financial administration at Walla Walla University. "Contractors are hungry."

Walla Walla had hoped to be under way with planning and construction of a new athletics facility, but that was delayed when fund raising slowed. Still, the renovations of classrooms and other buildings on the campus are going ahead.

The economy is also pushing more and more students to choose public colleges, which is good news for institutions like Iowa State University. Officials there had feared that enrollments would dip because of declining numbers of high-school graduates in the state, but enrollments are up, including those of out-of-state students, who pay higher tuition.

Iowa State's campus, in Ames, can accommodate about 28,000 students, "and we're hoping to keep it at the 27,000 to 28,000 range," said Warren R. Madden, vice president for business and finance. He said the institution is also seeing an increase in enrollments from international students and will have more students from China this fall than ever before.

The economy is prompting some research universities to take a fresh look at their approach to globalization. At the University of Colorado at Boulder, for example, officials are rethinking a plan to encourage every student to study abroad.

While study abroad is still a priority, the institution is also trying to keep up the number of international students coming to Boulder. State law requires it to limit the number of out-of-state students to no more than one-third of its total enrollment. The university is pushing for a change that would exclude international students from that cap.

The change would add diversity to the student body, said Richard F. Porreca, senior vice chancellor and chief financial officer, but it also is "a lot about dollars and sense," since most international students are full-paying students.

Saving Money

At many institutions, the focus is on saving money. To do so, some are moving to "strategic sourcing" contracts for services like travel, which had normally not been covered by such

systemwide purchasing contracts. The University of California system, for one, has even established its own online portal through which university employees can obtain discounted travel and hotel and car-rental rates. Airline deals have been harder to come by so far, said Anne Broome, vice president for financial management in the system's Office of the President.

The university has saved more than $160-million with the service, Ms. Broome said, and much of that was returned to the departments. The president's office is pushing to require departments to use the service, Ms. Broome said, but she thinks the built-in incentives should be powerful enough.

"Why do you want to line the pockets of our suppliers?" she asks colleagues. "Why not line our own?"

Another incentive, she said, is that university employees can book personal travel through the system: "You can use it for your vacation to Hawaii."

For a few universities, even the bad news of rising costs can be a blessing. Hardin-Simmons University, in Texas, is one of those lucky few.

"Oil prices are going up," said Harold R. Preston, senior vice president for finance and chief operations officer. "We've got some oil interests."

About a quarter of the university's $100-million endowment is held in oil rights, he said. And now that oil is back up to about $70 a barrel, the college has more money it can spend.

For more news from the Nacubo meeting in Boston, see the [News Blog](#).